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ABSTRACT

The history of children's literature in both Australia and Canada reflects a shared colonial past, evidenced through the development of individual national identities. Research into the relationship between Australian and Canadian children's literature, exemplified through the similarities and differences in the construction of those identities, is virtually unknown. J. Diakiw (1997) argues that there are powerful commonplaces in the construction of culture and identity, shared values that can be identified and revealed through story and literature. Schools too provide an important forum where these commonplaces can be explored, discussed and debated. This paper will use, as its framework, the 10 commonplaces proposed by Diakiw to explore the connection between Australian and Canadian identity, children's literature and the classroom. Through a selection of Canadian and Australian children's literature, the distinction between commerce and culture will also be examined. Australian and Canadian children's book publishers constantly make decisions about accepting the rhetoric of globalisation or maintaining national and local differences. Such decisions create tensions between "cultural value" and the "market," where text and audience become part of the wider context of industrial and professional production. The implications of these decisions will also be discussed. Contains 12 references. (Author/RS)

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Australian Association for Research in Education

Children's Literature: Vehicle for the transmission of national culture and identity or the victim of massmarket globalisation?

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Abstract

The history of children's literature in both Australia and Canada reflects a shared colonial past, evidenced through the development of individual national identities. Research into the relationship between Australian and Canadian children's literature, exemplified through the similarities and differences in the construction of those identities, is virtually unknown.

Diakiw (1997) argues that there are powerful commonplaces in the construction of culture and identity, shared values that can be identified and revealed through story and literature. Schools too provide an important forum where these commonplaces can be explored, discussed and debated. This paper will use, as its framework, the ten commonplaces proposed by Diakiw, to explore the connection between Australian and Canadian identity, children's literature and the classroom.

Through a selection of Canadian and Australian children's literature, the distinction between commerce and culture will also be examined. Australian and Canadian children's book publishers, constantly make decisions about accepting the rhetoric of globalisation or maintaining national and local differences. Such decisions create tensions between 'cultural value' and the 'market', where text and audience become part of the wider context of industrial and professional production. The implications of these decisions will also be discussed.

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Introduction

The questions to be explored in this paper are twofold. How do Australian and Canadian children's picture books reflect the commonplaces of national identity, and how do these national literatures challenge younger readers to discover who they are in the face of the mass market globalization of children's book publishing in the 21st century?

A nation's literature has traditionally been seen as a reflection of the values, tensions, myths, and psychology that identify a national character. Australia and Canada are many things to many people. They are places, nations and communities. They are also ideas that change constantly in the minds of their people and in debates about the past and the future. Benedict Anderson defines a nation as 'an imagined community' (1991, p.6). He maintains that the members of a nation never know each other, meet or hear each other, yet they still hold in common an image of who they are as a community of individuals.

How is a 'common image' passed on to children (and to people in general) in Australia and Canada? One of the ways in which an image is transmitted to a nation is through literature. Sarah Corse (1997) writes that national literatures are 'consciously constructed pieces of the national culture' (p.9) and that literature is 'an integral part of the process by which nation-states create themselves and distinguish themselves from other nations' (p.7). For young readers, national literatures play a crucial role in developing a sense of identity, a sense of belonging, of knowing who they are. In 1950, Australian author Miles Franklin argued that 'without an indigenous literature people can remain alien in their own soil'.

The history of children's literature in Australia and Canada charts trends in political and economic allegiances, reflecting both a colonial past and the development of individual national identities (Egoff & Saltman, 1990). For Australians and Canadians, national identity remains an important issue. Both countries are young, both have emerged from colonisation, both have unique histories and both see themselves as different or distinct from American global culture. Australians and Canadians have created images and symbols expressing how they see themselves and these too have changed over time.

The year 1949 is seen as a symbolic watershed in Australian historiography. War in the Pacific dispelled the last illusions of the British Empire. For Canadians, it was their increasingly strong tie to the U.S. economy, after World War II, that broke their strong relationship with Britain. New Australians and Canadians now create a new Australia and a new Canada, consciously formulated to accommodate and contain diversity within a vigorous national culture. Australia and Canada demand a future that is no longer derivative and dependent (Macintyre, 1994). Australia and Canada no longer regard themselves as an outpost of British culture and civility, but seek to promote a more 'inclusive' notion of national identity appropriate to changing global imperatives (Grant 2001).

Commonplaces of Australian and Canadian national identity

Is there a national way of life that characterises Australian and Canadian society? Do we have distinctive cultures and identities that distinguish us not only from each other but from other nations? Are there common conceptions or as Diakiw (1997) argues, 'commonplaces' in culture and identity - shared values that most Australians and Canadians can identify with, values that bind us together? Diakiw believes, like many others, that through story and literature, the classroom becomes an important place to discuss and debate the commonplaces that characterise national culture and identity (1997, p.26). Diakiw also believes that children's literature, by including all racial and ethnocultural origins, will play an important role in affirming Australian and Canadian culture and identity (1997,p.36). Many children's books, particularly picture books, provide valuable insights into the commonplaces of Australian and Canadian identity.

The Canadian common places Diakiw (1996) identified are that Canada:

- is a "wilderness nation"
- has powerful diverse and distinctive regional identities
- continues to engage in equity struggles
- possesses a strong sense of social welfare
- has a strong Indigenous/Aboriginal heritage
- is a nation of immigrants
- is founded on two cultures and is a bilingual nation (European traditions)
- possesses enormous resources and a high standard of living
- is rich in cultural traditions in the arts, sports and popular culture
- serves as peace-keeper for the world.

Diakiw believes that it is the layering of all of these commonplaces that produces a unique and distinctive Canadian culture. He also notes that some of these commonplaces are in opposition to others on the list and thus create a tension that is in itself a significant element of Canadian identity. We have used these commonplaces as a basis for exploring both Canadian and Australian children's books. Relevant books are listed under the basic themes Diakiw identified.

1. Wilderness nations

Although the vast majority of Australians and Canadians are now largely urban dwellers (until very recently most Canadians lived in rural areas), both countries have vast areas of rugged wilderness that continue to dominate their histories, mythologies and psyches, forming an indelible backdrop to their cultures and identities (Diakiw, 1997, p.30).

Australia

The Hidden Forest (2000) written and illustrated by Jeannie Baker.

One Child (1997) written by Chris Cheng, illustrated by Steven Woolman.

Where the Forest Meets the Sea (1987) written and illustrated by Jeannie Baker.

Tales of Snugglepot and Cuddlepie (1918) written and illustrated by May Gibbs.

Canada

Bear on the Train (1999) written by Julie Lawson, illustrated by Brian Deines.

A Mountain Alphabet (1996) written by Andrew Kiss, illustrated by Margriet Ruurs.

Mary of Mile 18 (1968) written and illustrated by Anne Blades.

Very Last First Time (1985) written by Jan Andrews and illustrated by Ian Wallace.

2. Countries of diverse and distinctive regions

Australians and Canadians have a strong identification with the land and it's human history. Australian life and agriculture has been shaped by the opportunities and limits of the natural environment. In Canada regional loyalties are powerful, complex and distinctive. Australians and Canadians have a strong sense of place beginning with neighbourhood or community and extending to the distinctive bio-regions of each country. The deserts, the coastlines and the fertile plains of Australia to the Maritimes, the Prairies and Pacific Coast of Canada. Today people create new myths and form new attachments to the places that have become significant to them.

Australia

A Coral Reef Tale Old Shell, New Shell (2001) written and illustrated by Helen Ward.

Rain Dance (2000) written by Cathy Applegate, illustrated by Dee Huxley.

Window (1991) written and illustrated by Jeannie Baker.

My Place (1987) written by Nadia Wheatley, illustrated by Donna Rawlins.

Possum Magic (1983) written by Mem Fox, illustrated by Julie Vivas.

Canada

Tiger's New Cowboy Boots (1996) written by Irene Morck and illustrated by Georgia Graham.

Northern Lights: The Soccer Trails (1993) written by Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak, illustrated by Vladyana Krykorka.

The Fishing Summer (1997) written by Teddy Jam and illustrated by Ange Zhang.

If You're Not From the Prairie (1993) written by David Bouchard, illustrated by Henry Ripplinger.

O Canada (1992) original words by Calixa LaVallée (in French and English) illustrated by Ted Harrison.

3. Continue to engage in equity struggles

Australians and Canadians often take their democratic freedoms for granted, but the histories of both countries are characterised by struggle. For Anglo-Australians the struggle to come to terms with a convict past, for Canadians the struggle to equitably represent the diverse cultures, needs and interests of its peoples. For both countries, past imperialism, immigration, racism and the rights of women, labourers and Indigenous people are also part of the continuing struggle for equity.

While most Australians and Canadians reject the language of moral correctness, we recognise a strong strand of morality in the Australian and Canadian character. Australians are attuned to a sense of right and wrong not reflected in the morality that is supported by authority, law and rule. For Australians it is represented most clearly in public discourse as 'a fair go'. For Canadians it is an earnestness that compels them to 'keep on going'. Both Australians and Canadians are propelled by a strong sense of community expressed through the rights of individuals and groups.

Australia

Memorial (1999) written by Gary Crew, illustrated by Shaun Tan.

Cherry Pie (1998) written by Gretel Killeen, illustrated by Francesca Partridge and Franck Dubuc.

The Race (1995) written by Christobel Mattingley, illustrated by Anne Spudvilas.

Idjhil (1996) written and illustrated by Helen Bell.

Way Home (1994) written by Libby Hathorn, illustrated by Gregory Rogers.

Waltzing Matilda (1970) written by A.B.Paterson, illustrated by Desmond Digby.

Canada

This Land is My Land (1993) written and illustrated by George Littlechild.

Ghost Train (1996) written by Paul Yee, illustrated by Harvey Chan.

Josepha (1994) written by Jim McGugan, illustrated by Murray Kimber.

The Magificent Piano Recital (2000) written by Marilynn Reynolds, illustrated by Laura Fernandez and Rick Jacobson.

Red Parka Mary (1996) written by Peter Eyvindson, illustrated by Rhian Brynjolson

4. Possess a strong sense of social welfare.

Compared with many older European cultures, Australia and Canada have a relatively flat class structure. Social fluidity is apparent and widely supported. Egalitarianism is reflected in an acceptance of difference and a wish to encourage tolerance of diversity and pluralism. Not all Australians and Canadians, however, are strongly pluralist or supportive of diversity. This tendency towards levelling of differences is also reflected in Australia's ready sympathy for the underdog. For Canadians it is a sense of social responsibility and seriousness. Current social trends which see a growing gap between high income earners and low income earners may, over time, erode this traditional element of Australian and Canadian identity.

Australia

Fox (2000) written by Margaret Wild, illustrated by Ron Brooks.

Luke's Way of Looking (2000) written by Nadia Wheatley, illustrated by Matt Ottley.

The Singing Hat (2000) written and illustrated by Tohby Riddle.

The Lost Thing (2000) written and illustrated by Shaun Tan

Downsized (1999) written by Mike Dumbleton, illustrated by Tom Jellett.

Mates (1997) by Weldon Kids.

Greetings from Sandy Beach (1990) written and illustrated by Bob Graham.

Canada

The Dust Bowl (1996) written by David Booth, illustrated by Karen Reczuch.

Boy of the Deeps (1999) written and illustrated by Ian Wallace.

Emma and the Silk Train (1997) written by Julie Lawson, illustrated by Paul Mombourquette.

Jeremiah Learns to Read (1997) written by Jo Ellen Bogart, illustrated by Laura Fernandez and Rick Jacobsen.

Bibi and the Bull (1995) written by Carol Vaage, illustrated by Georgia Graham.

Something from Nothing (1992) written and illustrated by Phoebe Gilman.

5. Strong Indigenous/Aboriginal heritage

Australian Aboriginal people have occupied Australia for at least 40,000 years, while Native Canadians are now believed to have migrated to North America more than 50, 000 years ago. The influence of Indigenous people on European settlement in both Australia and Canada has become part of a collective heritage which is only now being recognised and valued.

Australia

A is For Aunty (2000) written and illustrated by Elaine Russell.

The Rabbits (1998) written by John Marsden, illustrated by Shaun Tan.

The Burnt Stick (1994) written by Anthony Hill, illustrated by Mark Sofila.

Pigs and Honey (1990) written and illustrated by Jeanie Adams

Canada

The Elders are Watching (1997) written by David Bouchard, illustrated by Roy Henry Vickers.

The Fish Skin (1993) written by Jamie Oliviero, illustrated by Brent Morrisseau.

Two Pairs of Shoes (1990) written by Esther Sanderson, illustrated by David Beyer.

Baseball Bats for Christmas (1990) written by Michael Arvaarluk Kusugak, illustrated by Vladyana Krykorka.

A Man Called Raven (1997) written by Richard Van Camp and illustrated by George Littlechild

Note: These books, unlike many older Canadian books, are written and/or illustrated by Aboriginal Canadians.

6. Immigrant nations

The expansion and modernisation of Australia and Canada was achieved through the arrival of many immigrant groups from England, Ireland, Scotland, and in Canada, from France. Successive 'waves' of Chinese, German and Italian immigrants, to name but a few, also contributed to cultural diversity. More recently immigrants from Vietnam,

India, South America and the Caribbean have also arrived. Long before European colonisation, the Indigenous peoples already co-existed as multi-cultural entities (Diakiw, 1997, p.33). Canada's Multiculturalism Act, passed through parliament in 1971, promotes 'diversity united by identity'.

Australia

Mates (1997) by Weldon Kids.

Let's Eat (1996) written by Ana Zamorano, illustrated by Julie Vivas

Old Magic (1996) written by Allan Baillie, illustrated by Di Wu.

Rebel! (1994) written by Allan Baillie, illustrated by Di Wu.

Isabella's Bed (1991) written and illustrated by Alison Lester

Do Not go Around the Edges (1990) written by Daisy Utemorrah, illustrated by Pat Torres.

My Hiroshima (1987) written and illustrated by Junko Morimoto.

The Kinder Hat (1985) written by Morag Loh, illustrated by Donna Rawlins.

Canada

A Gift for Gita (1998) written by Rachna Gilmore, illustrated by Allison Priestley.

The Nutmeg Princess (1992) written by Richardo Keens-Douglas, illustrated by Annouchka Galouchko.

The Orphan Boy (1990) written by Tolowa Mollel, illustrated by Paul Morin.

The Always Prayer Shawl (1994) written by Sheldon Oberman, illustrated by Ted Lewin.

The Prairie Fire (1998) written by Marilynn Reynolds, illustrated by Laura Fernandez and Rick Jacobsen.

7. Nations founded on European traditions

Australia and Canada both share a colonial past. In Australia with the arrival of the British, in Canada with occupation first by the French and then by the British. The 'building blocks' of our cultures are firmly located in the traditions of European civilisation (Diakiw, 1997, p.32) and Empire, and for Canada, in a nation that is officially bilingual.

Australia

Aboard Endeavour (1995) written by Bruce Stannard, illustrated by Sandra Larouche.

The First Fleet (1982) written by Alan Boardman, illustrated by Roland Harvey.

Click Go the Shears (1984) anonymous Australian ballad, illustrated by Robert Ingpen.

Canada

Stella, Queen of the Snow (2000) written and illustrated by Marie-Louise Gay.

Mollie Whuppie and the Giant (1982) written and illustrated by Robin Muller.

Hansel and Gretel (1994) written and illustrated by Ian Wallace.

9. Possess enormous resources and maintain a high standard of living

Widely identified as belonging to 'young' countries, Australians and Canadians show a readiness to embrace innovation not found in societies more closely bound by traditional codes and expectations. This quality brings a flexibility to the Australian and Canadian character. Australians and Canadians are seen to be buoyant and lively with an eagerness to explore and adopt new ideas and innovations, with a penchant for risk-taking and adventure. Not all, however, have equal access to the national wealth with many Aboriginal and Inuit communities in particular still living in conditions where their social and physical needs are not being met.

Australia

You'll Wake the Baby (2000) written by Catherine Jinks, illustrated by Andrew McLean.

The Midnight Feast (1999) written by Margaret Wild, illustrated by Ann James.

Hello Baby (1999) written by Jenni Overend, illustrated by Julie Vivas.

Highway (1998) written by Nadia Wheatley, illustrated by Andrew McLean.

Arabella (1998) written by Wendy Orr, illustrated by Kim Gamble.

The Watertower (1994) written by Gary Crew, illustrated by Steven Woolman.

Canada

Melted Star Journey (1999) written by Nancy Hundal, illustrated by Karen Reczuch.

A Screaming Kind of Day (1999) written by Rachna Gilmore, illustrated by Gordon Sauve.

At Granpa's Sugar Bush (1997) written by Margaret Carney, illustrated by Janet Wilson.

The Strongest Man This Side of Cremona (1998) written and illustrated by Georgia Graham.

10. Are rich in cultural traditions in the arts, sports and popular culture

National identity is shaped in significant ways by the way we use our leisure time. Traditionally, Australia has been seen as a sporting culture because many Australians use their leisure time to participate in sport as a player or spectator. Canadians are also involved in popular participatory sports such as ice hockey, curling, baseball and skiing.

While Australians have been ready to see themselves as athletic, we have been slow to recognise that we contribute significantly to a global intellectual and artistic culture. This view of Australian identity runs counter to stereotypes which sees Australians as anti-intellectual, as 'little Aussie battlers', or as merely bronzed 'sun worshippers'. Canadians have always regarded their culture as rich in the arts, although many Canadians fear (as do many Australians) that the continuous barrage of mass media from the United States puts Canadian (and Australian) culture at risk.

The confident and outgoing Australian is a recent development in the Australian identity. It has emerged in the past 10-15 years as Australia has thrown off the last remaining traces of a subservience to British culture and rejected the previously common stance of 'cultural cringe'.

Australia

Ernie Dances to the Didgeridoo (2000) written and illustrated by Alison Lester.

Australia at the Beach (1999) written by Max Fatchen, illustrated by Tom Jellett.

Canada

The Moccasin Goalie (1995) written and illustrated by William Roy Brownridge.

A Canadian AbeCedarium: Eh? To Zed (2000) written by Kevin Major, illustrated by Alan Daniel.

Jacob Two-Two Meets the Hooded Fang (1977) written by Mordecai Richler, illustrated by Fritz Wegner.

The Sugaring-Off Party (1995) written by Jonathan London, illustrated by Gilles Pelletier.

10. Serve as peace-keepers for the world.

Australians and Canadians have willingly fulfilled their role as peacekeepers in the global community, feeling proud of their international stature as countries that can be trusted and relied upon, particularly in times of crisis. Australian and Canadian citizens also have a long tradition of involvement with peace movements, speaking out against war and militarism.

Australia

Prayer for the Twenty-First Century (1997) written by John Marsden.

Canadian

In Flanders Fields: The Story of the Poem by John McCrae (1995) written by Linda Granfield, illustrated by Janet Wilson.

Children's Literature and National identity

Gill and Howard (2001) interviewed 85 Australian children from the upper primary (elementary) school years about what it means to be Australian. Although the children lacked any 'formal knowledge of national representation' (p.3), they did suggest a sense of national identity which reflect Diakiw's commonplaces in terms of the environment (issues and concerns), belonging to a peaceful nation, and being positive and inclusive in attitude towards difference. The children did not, however, mention songs, poetry or literature that was typically Australian nor did they mention Australian history. Gill and Howard concluded that for these children Australia is 'an easy going happy place which has gained their active approval albeit in ways that do not ask much of them' (p.6). The children who took part in the study appeared to take their cues more from television, video and the Internet than from literature and "the arts".

The message of national identity reinforced by those 85 children is applicable to both Australia and Canada. In order to be and become Australian or Canadian we all need to become involved in a cultural practice that is dynamic and constantly changing. The implications for educators is that we need to 'engage in critical reflections about issues of national identity' as we are 'inevitably playing a part in the making of it' Gill and Howard (2001, p.7).

Davidson (1997) argues, however, that there is a 'new nationalism' emerging in an attempt to re-create the foundations of Australian identity through recourse to the idea of exclusion of those who do not 'belong'. One of Australia's defining features is it's identification as a democracy, expressed in a constitution which is frozen in an age of racism and imperialism, an age in which Australia was still attempting to define itself in relation to the 'other'. Colonialism has expressed itself through an ideology that promotes economic rationalism as the norm on which all should follow. Culture too has become a commodity.

The globalization of children's book publishing

The importance of the continued publication of books such as those listed in the first half of this paper, many published by small independent publishing companies, stands in stark contrast to the current trend towards globalization in the publishing industry. Hade (2001) concluded that in the year 2000 eight corporations produced over 84% of the books reviewed in the US publication *The Horn Book Magazine* and 75% of those receiving a starred review in *School library Journal*. Those eight corporations have little interest in publishing quality literature for children, but they have enormous interest in marketing. Marketing revolves around branding, licensing, the vertical integration of companies, synergy, and most importantly, meaning brokering. The eight companies to which Hade refers are:

Vivendi - owns Houghton Mifflin and Clarion.

Viacom - owns Simon and Schuster, McElderry Books, Atheneum and others.

The News Corporation - owns HarperCollins, Greenwillow, and Avon.

Pearson - own Penguin Putnam, Viking, Philomel, Dutton, Dorling Kindersley and Dial.

Bertelsmann - owns Bantam, Doubleday, Dell, Delacorte, Random House, Crown and Knopf.

Von Holzbrinck - owns Henry Holt, Farrar Straus Giroux, and Macmillan UK.

Reed Elsevier - owns Harcourt, (including Publishers Weekly and The School Library Journal).

Scholastic - owns Grolier, and is now the largest publisher and distributor of children's books in the world. It has published some of the most popular books in the history of children's literature including: Goosebumps, the Baby-sitters Club, Animorphs, The Magic School Bus, Clifford the Big Red Dog, and Harry Potter.

Hade (2001, p.3), like Diakiw, maintains that "we use stories to interpret the events in our lives and to form our ideas about ourselves and others. These eight corporations plus a few others such as Disney and AOL Time Warner have become meaning brokers in our culture. These corporations hold a near monopoly of our culture's stories and the means to communicate those stories to us. Together they form a culture-producing industry".

There is no doubt that big media now owns the children's book industry. Cultural meaning is increasingly brokered, and reading has become an act of consuming. Where the book has traditionally been considered as an artefact, it is now a product or commodity, created by a team of manufacturers (Sheahan-Bright, 2000). The traditional model for publishing children's books, based primarily on serving libraries, has been replaced by the media industry model, selling entertainment to the masses.

Conclusions/Reflections

We are left with a number of questions. Should literacy be about helping people to become sophisticated global citizens or sophisticated consumers? If one large company owns and markets its books and their associated merchandise, it is unlikely to produce culturally specific material. The most likely result is that such a company will try to develop a global market for culturally non-specific products. Who then constructs the national identities for countries such as Australia and Canada?

What does this mean for young readers in Australia and Canada, as well as for the authors and illustrators? In small nations such as Australia and Canada, how can a national voice be heard? Does it mean the end of national literatures when, in Canada at any rate, a national literature has only just developed. What authors and illustrators choose to represent through literature, and what publishing houses are willing to publish, have always been political and economic decisions. Certainly, Canadian publishing companies have recently been willing to take the risk of publishing works for children that reflect perspectives from a diverse range of Canadians, regardless of ethnicity, culture, religion, sexual orientation or any other form of 'difference'.

Contemporary Australian and Canadian books can help children to understand what it means to be Australian/Canadian today. We believe this is a most important aspect of any child's social development. The invented traditions of our cultures are being re-invented, retold, and re-imagined by the authors and illustrators committed to the young readers of Australia and Canada. Through them, children learn to interpret the events in their lives and to form ideas about themselves and others living in the "imagined community" they share.

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